

HER RAJAH'S HEIRLOOM

BY FLORENCE MARRYAT.

Author of "Her Lord and Master," Etc.

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I suppose nobody has forgotten the

great Manchester swindle, when John

Crawford and Theodore Alcock managed

abscond with twenty thousand

pounds of their employers' and bolted

across the Atlantic before we

could get on their trail. It took me

x weeks of my time and a regular

case and no mistake before I ran

to the sound of earth in Chicago,

where they were giving themselves

up as English lords. However, I succeeded

in catching their trail, and I didn't

re how much trouble it had cost me,

had brought Messrs. Mears and Al-

cock back safe to their native country

and delivered them over to the proper

authorities, and I thought I had earned

few days' rest. We had had a wretched

passage across, with head winds against

eight days out of the ten, and, my

city done, I thought with keen satis-

faction of my little place at Fulham

and my own comfortable feather bed

and my wife waiting to welcome me

with a tasty little supper.

The reality was as good as the antici-

pation. It was a beautiful autumn after-

noon, with a driving rain and a cold

west wind, but the cottage looked

right and cozy and warm, and Nancy

as red as a peony from pleasure at

seeing me.

It was early when I reached home, not

more than five o'clock, but I was a reg-

ular beat, and when I had had my din-

ner off, tripe and onions I felt good

for nothing but to go to bed and sleep. I

couldn't keep my eyes open, and my

life's chatter sounded like a confused

eddy of sound. I couldn't even re-

lax, but took a drop of Scotch hot

and staggered up to my own room.

Whatever you do, my dear," I said

Nancy, "don't disturb me till you

hear I'm awake again, for I've got

several nights' rest to make up. I'll

lock my door, and don't come till I un-

lock it—unless, indeed, it's something

very particular, like a message from

the chief, or such like."

"For, Jark!" exclaimed Nancy—

however my wife uses the affectionate

nickname of my name she always pro-

nounces it as if she were a jockey,

making known its desire for food.

"For, Jark!" he'd never be sending

for you so soon as this, and you just

sit on board ship! You go to sleep and

think no more of such foolishness!"

"Nancy," I replied, "the business of

the state must be attended to, at any

rate. I don't expect anything of the

sort, but if a wire should arrive I must

attend to it without delay."

"Dread the state!" cried Nancy. "It

don't pay you over and above so much

that it has any call to rob you of your

natural rest. Go to sleep, John Busby,

or you will be fit for nothing to-mor-

row morning!"

"I find it difficult to convince my wife

of the enormous importance of my of-

fice, and the dignity of my employers.

It is always "dratting" the govern-

ment, and "blowing" the superintendent

of police, in a manner which would

set me my appointment if overheard,

and she is a good wife to me and she

seems well. I suppose it is hard

on a woman to have her hus-

band called away at all manner

of times, and never to know

when to expect him back again. But

I had no inclination to argue the mat-

ter. I crawled upstairs to my

bedroom and was soon between the

blankets, sunk in a profound slumber

so profound that I became utterly un-

conscious to all external things, and

did not even the power to dream. It

seemed as if I had been sleeping for

years, for days, when I was roused by

the sound of an uncertain tapping on

my bedroom door, and an apologetic

voice, calling in a loud whisper,

"Jark!" As soon as I became suffi-

ciently conscious to recognize the voice,

I was sure something of importance

must have occurred, and was on the

verge of a moment, for my detectives

earn to sleep with our ears open.

"What is it, Nancy?" I exclaimed,

urging to open the door. My wife

was half-crying outside it, with a

yellow envelope in her hand.

"O, Jark!" she said, "there's a nasty

telegram come for you, and I wouldn't

the Atlanta, she shipped a sea over

this one, and it must go to the cleaner's."

The Gables is a big place, I've heard,

and I must dress accordingly."

"And how long will you be gone,

Jark?"

"That I can't say! It must be a se-

rious robbery, or the chief wouldn't

have ordered me to travel by the night

mail. No time to be lost, I guess!

Now, get me a hansom, there's a good

husband! I must call at the yard for my

instructions before I catch the mail

from Paddington."

My wife did as I requested her,

weeping quietly the while. I kissed

her hastily, jumped into the hansom,

told the driver to go as if the old man

were after him, and started for Scot-

land Yard.

"I was sorry to have you up again

so soon, Busby," said the inspector.

"But there's no help for it! Just had in-

formation from Manningford to send

down the sharpest detective we have,

and you know who that is, when you're

at home!"

This compliment from my inspector,

who is no flatterer as a rule, pleased

me very much, and I felt the strength

of a lion rise in me at his words. I

fancy I got a bit red, as I answered:

"Thank you kindly, sir! I suppose

the business is of importance!"

"Every importance! Property to

the amount of thirty thousand pounds

missing, under circumstances which

seem to point to—however, I shall leave

you to find out that for yourself! You

may be detained some days in The

Gables; indeed, you are sure to be.

Are you prepared for it?"

"I can write to Mrs. Busby for what

I may require, sir," I replied. "May I

ask on whose information we are act-

ing?"

"O yes! No secrecy about the mat-

ter! The person who has written for

your attendance is Sir Charles Elles-

mere, the master of the house. His

father died only last week—he was

buried yesterday—the jewels found

missing after the reading of the will.

He says they are of fabulous value,

and a family heirloom."

"All the better," I said, "they will

be more easily traced. They won't

give me so much trouble as Messrs.

Mears and Alcock's gold and silver did.

Stones can be melted down into

lumps of ore!"

"Ah! Busby," the inspector was good

enough to say for the second time,

"that was a sharp piece of work and

it won't be forgotten! You'll reach

Manningford about five o'clock, so you

had better put up at a hotel till you've

had your breakfast, then off to The

Gables as soon as may be!"

"Very good, sir! I'll start at once,

and wire you all particulars as soon

as I've heard them. And if I require

assistance, I'll have Crew, if you're

willing. He has the coolest head, I

know!"

"After your own, Busby!" said the

inspector, laughing, and I thanked him

again, and started on my journey. It

was November, and the night was bit-

terly cold. I wrapped myself up well

in my rug, and leaning back in a corner

of the railway carriage, tried to resume

my broken slumbers, but it was useless.

I had been too thoroughly roused.

When I arrived at the Manningford

hotel, I sat in one corner of the office

room till it was light enough to have my

breakfast. By that time several cus-

tomers, chiefly travelers, were down

also, and two or three outsiders had

strayed in to warm themselves with a

cup of tea or coffee before they started

on their day's work. I soon found that

the mysterious robbery at The Gables

was the general topic of conversation.

"But it's quite incomprehensible!"

said one man, "the jewels were safe and

sound in the old baronet's bedroom a

week before he died, for Rachel Marks

saw them with her own eyes! And no

one entered the room till after, and then

only the undertakers!"

"Ah! then undertakers!" exclaimed

another man, "I wouldn't trust them

any further than I could see 'em! Why!

I remember when my mother died, and

they were left in the room to lay her in

her coffin, there wasn't a pin left in the

cushion the next morning, and the very

rop was took out of the soapdish, for

I've heard my sister say so a score of

times."

"Then jewels was worth a power of

money," interposed a third. "The old

gentleman he got them from the king of

the Indies, and they was valued at a

million pounds!"

"He stole them, most likely," said the

first speaker. "It was in the days of

old John Company, when the Britishers

stole right and left; 'loot,' they

called it, but it came to the same thing!

And now, you see, this is what they call

a Nemesis! They've lost them again!

For! It won't be for long! Sir Charles,

he has telegraphed for a detective from

London, and all the servants are forbid-

den to leave the house till he comes! He'll

find 'em, never fear! They can't have

walked off by themselves, nor they

can't be very far, neither! All I know

is, that I wouldn't like to be the man as

has got 'em. The officer he'll sniff 'em

out soon enough!"

"The man!" repeated his companion,

contemptuously. "Tain no man as has

his lady's skirts. He'd better shake out

his own Jewels. There was always mad

to get 'em, and mad again the young

baronet, and she has 'em, you may take

my word for it! Ah! there's no artful-

ness to beat the artfulness of a woman!"

sighed, rather than said, the other man,

as though he had cause to know it.

PART II.

I listened to their talk, but, of course,

I said nothing. So that was the way

the land lay, I thought to myself! It

was true that little dependence was to

be placed on these bawling opinions,

yet a long experience had taught me

that there was seldom smoke without

fire. I tried to maintain an unpreju-

diced mind, but it is difficult to estin-

guish a train of thought, once lighted,

and found myself thinking there

might be a good deal of sense in the la-

borer's surmise.

As soon as my breakfast was con-

cluded and I could leave the hotel with-

out creating suspicion as to my errand

I made my way quietly to The Gables,

and, sending in my card, inquired for

Sir Charles Ellesmere. The old butler

who answered the door to me glanced

at the card and then at me, and said,

quietly:

"I'm glad you've come, sir! There's

been a terrible upset here!"

"So I understand. What is your

name?"

"Goddard, sir, and I've been man and

boy in The Gables ever since the late

master came home from the East Indies

now forty years ago!"

"Ah! Then I dare say you'll be a

valuable adjunct in this matter. I shall

have a talk with you, Goddard, by and

by. At present my first business is

with your master."

"Of course, sir! This way, if you

please!" And the butler preceded me

into a handsome library, well furnished

with bookshelves.

In another minute the door reopened

and Sir Charles Ellesmere, dressed in

deep mourning, stood before me. He

was a singularly handsome young man

though looking pale and careworn. He

motioned me to a seat and took one him-

self.

"You wired to Scotland Yard for me

yesterday, I understand, Sir Charles?"

"I did. There has been a most serious

robbery committed on these premises,

and I suppose, Mr. Busby," he said,

looking at my card, which he held in

his hand, "that I must tell you every-

thing I know concerning it?"

"It would be better, Sir Charles," I

replied. "Perhaps you will begin by de-

scribing the jewels you have lost."

"I know very little about jewelry,"

he said, "but they were magnificent,

and my late father has often told me

that they were valued at from twenty-

five to thirty thousand pounds."

"They must have been unique to

have cost that sum," I remarked.